The Anthropologist and the Digital
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Slides: http://www.slideshare.net/carladmartin/the-anthropologist-and-the-digital

This talk was given on November 20, 2013 at the American Anthropological Association meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

The Modern Language Association and American Historical Association have both devoted considerable institutional energy to addressing the digital humanities, with special sessions, formal statements, and blog posts initiating discussions on the importance of the digital to student training, scholarly ethics, or tenure. As William Pannapacker put it in a 2011 blog post about the MLA, “The digital humanities are not some flashy new theory that might go out of fashion. At this point, the digital humanities are The Thing. There’s no Next about it. And it won’t be long until the digital humanities are, quite simply, ‘the humanities.’” Yet while a number of prominent anthropologists have for years been leaders in the anthropological study of the digital, our own so-called “slow social science” and its biggest organization, the American Anthropological Association, have yet to address the question of the anthropologist and the digital with the same care.

To put this in context, the MLA meeting of January 2013 had a full 66 sessions devoted to the digital humanities, accounting for approximately 8% of the total sessions. While the AAA meeting is slightly smaller than the MLA, the number of sessions devoted to the digital is disproportionately smaller; only about 20 sessions in the program qualify, or around 2.5% of the total sessions. This is a missed opportunity.

In today’s job market, anthropologists who wish to be seen as attractive candidates for employment can greatly improve their visibility as thought leaders in their discipline, build their professional networks, improve their research practice, and develop desirable skills in technology by using the many digital tools that are readily available online. Tenure track search committees increasingly emphasize the importance of digital teaching expertise in job announcements and hiring decisions. In addition, digital expertise opens up numerous alt-academic opportunities in fields such as educational technology, consulting, web and app development, documentary film and radio, advertising and marketing, non-academic publishing, and broadly in entrepreneurship.

If you are an anthropologist who wishes to capitalize on these possibilities and opportunities, you need to be conscientious about your use of the digital and how it relates to your work or desired work. My goal today is to give you a brain dump of information on how to be an effective anthropologist preparing to seek academic or alt-academic employment in the digital age.

1. Develop a robust professional web presence.

Ultimately, a robust professional web presence can make the difference in your visibility to your desired audience and create opportunities for new projects, collaborations, and jobs. The world’s most popular search engine, by far, is Google, and we all know how often we as scholars turn to Google to find information about someone we have met. If an online search cannot find and
produce useful information about you and your work, then you are essentially irrelevant or nonexistent and probably significantly less likely to be read, cited, applied, or taught. (Learn how to Google yourself effectively.) A robust professional web presence goes beyond simply having a basic bio listed on an institutional site – and this is the sole presence that many anthropologists have today.

You need to put your professional content on the web, be conscious about making it show up when people search for you, and make it as intuitive as possible for others to learn about you and your work. Ideally, this means that you will make a professional website for yourself and buy a specific domain name for it, one that belongs to you rather than your institution. Even someone with basic technical literacy can set up a free site with Google Sites or Wordpress.com and add a personalized domain name for about $10/year. You can also use a site like About.me or Academia.edu as a digital landing place. (To learn how to set up any of these sites, turn to Google and YouTube for instructions and advice.)

Your professional site will serve as a centralized digital clearinghouse of your professional brand. It will become the main place where you control your online presence and promote your work. It will be your consistent online home regardless of job changes or institutional website redesigns. It will attract traffic to your site rather than solely to a university’s website and provide you with easy methods to track visitors and their activity. It will increase your options to create additional content, for example if you would like to start blogging or posting presentations or teaching materials. And, importantly, it will increase your search engine ranking, putting the content that you develop at the top of Google’s search results. (Read more on search engine optimization strategies for academics.)

2. Leverage social media for research, learning, and networking.

We often think of social media as the place where we do fun, social stuff inappropriate for fancy scholarly work. Consider, for example, these memes that have spread among academics (see slide 5): Feminist Ryan Gosling, Grumpy Cat, Academic Tim Gunn, and Academic Coach Taylor.

But there are a number of different ways in which you can leverage social media for research, learning, and networking. In fact, many of the digitally connected scholars with whom I have spoken agree that they now receive more invitations to speak and collaborate as a result of their social networking than any other professional activity.

Publication sharing sites, depending on your discipline and focus, are important spaces for making your work available online.

- Academia.edu
- Google Scholar
- Microsoft Scholar Search
- Zotero
- Mendeley
- If applicable: your university library
You should also explore publishing opportunities in well-respected open access journals in your field. Many see this as an important part of the ethical responsibility to make your work available for consumption by the people about whom you write and the general public, who are more often than not entirely excluded from access to scholarly publishing.

When it comes to presentations and teaching materials, there are also important sites for sharing.
- [Slideshare](#)
- [MERLOT](#)

You will note that the slides for my talk are available [here](#) on Slideshare, making it quick and simple to share them with the attendees of this talk for later reference. These types of tools are worth investigating, especially but not exclusively if you are interested in a teaching focused career.

Then there are social networking sites. At the very least, it is wise to create professional profiles on [Google+](#) and [LinkedIn](#). You can be quite minimalist about your use of these sites or you can use them extensively. Either way, by linking your own professional website to these two, you can increase your standing in search rankings.

Other social networking sites, most notably [Twitter](#), but also [Tumblr](#) and [Facebook](#), when used well, can contribute an enormous value add. They help you: build community around your work and experience, learn about new research, publications, conferences, and conversations, keep up with the latest news relevant to what you do (and lots of other news that you might otherwise miss), and promote your work. (There are countless guides to social networking sites online. Many are designed specifically for academics, such as [this one](#) on Twitter from the LSE.)

Your profiles on all of these sites should be complete, professional, up to date, and wherever possible link among one another. You should also use consistent keywords and tags about your work, as these help search engines help you.

As you leverage social media, you should also be conscious of the [bibliometrics](#) and [altmetrics](#) of your work, which measure your impact. If, like me, you seek a broader audience, there are now a number of organizations that aim to teach scholars how to reimagine scholarly communication for the public good. Two of my favorites are [JustPublics@365](#) and [Scholars Strategy Network](#).

### 3. Use digital tools in research.

Digital tools increasingly provide efficient solutions to common research problems while also nurturing widely applicable skills. Here is a loosely categorized list of some popular tools:

**Curation and storytelling tools**
- [Pinterest](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [Storify](#)
- [Diigo](#)
- [Evernote](#)
- [Flickr](#)
- Wikis
- Goodreads
- Camscanner
- SugarSync
- Omeka

Writing tools
- Google Drive
- Scrivener

Presentation tools
- YouTube
- Prezi
- Soundcloud
- Zeega
- Worldmap

These tools allow you to hypertext, link, tag, save, search, take notes, archive, and present. You can use many of these tools to collaborate and make your work public, with the obvious resulting benefits. Take the time to investigate these or others that might improve your productivity. When more anthropologists actively use digital tools, digital tools will improve for anthropologists. The significant added benefit of developing digital expertise is that it also makes you a desirable employee in a wide range of fields.

4. Master multimedia technology in support of teaching or alt-academy careers.

More and more, mastery of multimedia technology is attractive to employers. At the very least, you should be familiar with learning and content management systems (e.g. Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle) and, whether you like them or not, you should be conversant about MOOCs, the thorny debates surrounding them, and the types of classes and styles of instruction they offer.

MOOCs
- Udacity
- Coursera
- EdX
- Khan Academy
- Peer-to-Peer University
- Udemy
- Course Hero

Often, the best people to guide you as you learn more are the librarians, archivists, and technologists on campus. In the Boston area, I have spoken with hiring managers and recruiters for a variety of education industry jobs who agree that anthropologists with experience in digital pedagogy often make strong candidates.
The skills of anthropologists are also attractive to ed tech, consulting, startup, and tech giant companies. Social scientists are hired by these kinds of organizations often in Boston, but this practice is also prevalent in other cities, which is a bonus if you seek an urban lifestyle. If you are interested in learning more about these spaces, there are a number of organizations that can help.

Ed Tech
- Learn Launch
- Blue Ridge Foundation

Startups
- Startup Institute
- Intelligent.ly
- Startup School

And there are now more than ever vibrant online publications, services, and communities that can assist you as you navigate your way through being an anthropologist in the digital age.

Online publications and services
- Profhacker
- Chronicle Vitae
- Inside Higher Ed
- DHPoco
- #TransformDH
- Conditionally Accepted
- PhD(isabled)
- The Adjunct Project
- How To Leave Academia
- From PhD To Life
- The Professor Is In

Online communities
- Versatile PhD
- PhinisheD
- Doctorates Without Borders (e.g. Cambridge, MA meetup)

**Conclusion**

To conclude, jobs in academic and alt-academic spaces increasingly require digital expertise. The American Anthropological Association could and should make a speedy effort to address this formally. In the meantime, it is to your benefit as a mentor or job seeker to learn about digital tools and communities and advise students to do the same. Investment in the digital is an investment in your work. And you should approach it like anything else, as a scholar. If you don’t know how something works, research it and ask for guidance. Determine which tools and
communities are a help and which are a hindrance. Manage the technology; don’t let it manage you.

We are at an extraordinary time in which the digital divide has become less about access and more about ownership, content, and control. The digital is here to stay and its presence is not neutral (see slide 14). Anthropologists need to not only study digital technology but also play an active role as participants shaping the digital age.

Thank you! And please keep in touch:

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